

Hiding in the House on Neibolt Street by TopazTeardrop

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Summary:

Richie Tozier wanted to be alone.

Yes, believe it or not, sometimes the trashmouth himself, king of being the center of attention, needed to be alone. Away from his friends and his parents. He couldn't really put a finger on why. Most days, he loved being surrounded by others. Richie craved attention from his friends, especially Eddie. But there were days where the concept of being the "trashmouth," bold and funny and loud, was so incredibly daunting.

or

the one where Richie goes to the Neibolt house whenever he wants to hide away, and the time Eddie follows him there

Hiding in the House on Neibolt Street

Author's Note:

Like every one of my fic, I wrote this between the hours of 12 and 3 AM. Please check the tags for trigger warnings. This one is sad for awhile but it ends happy, I promise. Also it was not proofread, so I may edit and add shit in the morning

Richie Tozier wanted to be alone.

Yes, believe it or not, sometimes the trashmouth himself, king of being the center of attention, needed to be alone. Away from his friends and his parents. He couldn't really put a finger on why. Most days, he loved being surrounded by others. Richie craved attention from his friends, especially Eddie. But there were days where the concept of being the "trashmouth," bold and funny and loud, was so incredibly daunting. Those days had been coming more and more frequently as Richie entered his high school years. He could tell it was that sort of day when he woke up, he'd feel an empty pit in his stomach and resent the idea of having to face the reality of his life. But he'd drag himself out of bed and fulfill the motions of the day, doing his best impression of the eccentric character he made himself out to be.

But eventually his battery would run out and he'd feel the overwhelming urge to be alone. To have all eyes off of him so he didn't have to front smiles or crack jokes. After school he'd find some chicken shit excuse to abandon the losers and go home, but even there he didn't feel right. He hated having to walk past his mother slumped in a chair, drunk or asleep or on the rare occasion, yelling at his father. He wasn't home often enough for it to be commonplace, but it felt whenever he was around there would be screaming.

So no, home didn't feel right. For a very long time, Richie was frustrated by his lack of places to be alone. The odds of being interrupted in the clubhouse were too high, and all other good spots ran the risk of encountering one of the remaining members of Bowers's gang. In his long searches for places to be alone he'd

encountered bullies a few times and the result was about as pleasant as you might expect. Richie almost gave up hope until he remembered one place he was positive no one would come looking for him.

The house on Neibolt street.

The first day he dared to back there had been bad. He'd woken up with that pit in his stomach, an unpleasant *good morning! today's gonna be shit*. He'd had a hard time keeping his jokes up, Eddie asked him multiple times what was wrong and Richie never had a convincing answer. Between classes, Vic Criss had caught him staring off into space and promptly shoved him against a locker, screaming profanities in his face. Apparently Richie had been staring at a friend of Vics, and he naturally took it the worst way possible. So Richie got to go the rest of the school day with a headache from connecting with the lockers.

By the time the final bell rang, Richie's internal battery was well worn out. He couldn't muster the slightest energy to force an aloof attitude or lewd joke. As the losers walked out the front gate, Richie bee-lined to his bike on the rack, ready to go home.

"You coming Richie?" Beverly asked, cutting off his train of thought.

Richie hadn't been listening to the conversation, more focused on crawling into bed and sleeping for twelve hours. "Coming?" He repeated.

"To the clubhouse, man." Eddie supplied, giving Richie a frustrated glance. "Where the hell is your head at?"

Richie did his best to grin, but it came out pained. "I'm actually not feeling so hot, fellas. Think I might turn in early."

All the losers raised their eyebrows at him, knowing Richie was normally never one to miss a hangout in the clubhouse. Eddie looked twice as concerned as the rest, squinting at Richie's face. Richie couldn't meet his eye.

"Are you sick?" He asked, stepping forward to put a hand against

Richie's forehead. Richie dodged him easily, in no mood to deal with what Eddie's hand on him did for his heartbeat.

"Whoa, hey now, don't get your thong in a twist." Eddie scowled at him, but continued to try to take his temperature. "I'm all good Eds, really! Just tired, didn't sleep to great last night and now its biting me in the ass."

"That's not my name dickhead." Eddie answered, but stepped back appearing convinced by Richie's lie. "You should sleep like a fucking human then, I swear to god its like you're nocturnal. That's a grade A way to fuck your immune system, you know-"

Richie just brushed Eddie off, mounting his bike as he spoke. "I know Doctor K, I know. I'll go catch up on my sleep now." Richie was desperate to leave, he could feel a snap building if he didn't get left alone soon. He started to pedal. "See you losers tomorrow!"

"And drink water you idiot!" Eddie shouted after him, watching Richie ride away from them, leaving the losers in silence.

Beverly broke it. "Well he was fuckin' weird today." She stated, crossing her arms.

"Yea," Stan agreed. "What was that about?"

Eddie said nothing, but watched as Richie vanished around the street corner. *What could possibly be wrong?*

Richie made it to his house in record time, fully ready to curl up in bed and shut the world out. But by the time he'd reached his front porch, his heart fell. He could hear them from the lawn, his parents screaming at one another. Great. There's no peace waiting for him there. Even if he managed to sneak past his fighting parents, he'd get no rest listening to them argue like that. Defeated, Richie plopped into the grass and fought back tears. He had nowhere to go. Where could he hide away from his parents, his bullies, hell, even his friends?

That's what it struck him.

The ride to Neibolt street was a mad blur, and in no time at all,

Richie was standing just outside the property line of the house. Staring at the front door, Richie searched himself for fear. Oddly enough, the only fear he had was that the longer he stood out here, the longer he ran the risk of being spotted. Richie just desperately wanted to be alone and drop his charade, to let himself sag with the weight he constantly felt on his shoulders. He'd been on the edge of crying all day, but now that his body was sensing that he was alone, tears started to gather in his eyes. That did it. He marched up the front steps, opened the door, and stepped inside.

The house looked just as it had nearly four years ago. The entryway was covered with cobwebs and the air thick with dust that spiralled into the open front room. To the right, Richie could peer into the kitchen. He felt bile rise in his throat when he saw how evident it was that the losers had been the last people here. The table Eddie had crashed into still lay in splinters around the room, now covered in a thick layer of dust and grime. Richie was sure if he looked hard enough, he'd be able to find dried blood on the ground from when Ben was attacked. He turned away then, choosing to ignore that room.

Instead he wandered back into the front sitting room. The was still haphazard furniture everywhere with cobwebs hanging between all possible surfaces. Richie locked onto one particular love seat, the one that once had Richie's missing poster hanging above it. There was no such poster now, so Richie settled onto the couch.

Richie had expected to be more uneasy, sitting where him and his friends had almost died. He knew that above his head, he'd find traces of the torture he'd endured here. Worse still, beneath his feet there were corpses. Dozens of them. Children's corpses, Bill's brother among them, resting with the beast that had put them all there. But all he felt was hollow. The more Richie sat there, the more Richie got the feeling that this house was hollow too. He was alone.

Richie put his face in his hands and cried.

Somehow, visiting the house on Neibolt street helped Richie. Over the next few weeks He would take refuge there a number of times,

when his mother got too drunk or a member of the bowers gang split his lip, or just when he woke up with that pit in his stomach. He'd sit there on his love seat, thinking and smoking cigarettes, occasionally crying. Mostly thinking though. He'd think about the thing beneath the floorboards, his parents, Eddie.

Richie had made his peace with being in love with Eddie the day they all cut open their palms. He'd seen the full range of everything Eddie was that day. He saw his fears and his anxiety, but he also saw unmatched bravery and unbridled rage all wrapped up in the most beautiful spitfire boy in the world. Before that day, Richie's feelings for Eddie had been a schoolboy crush, something that made him beyond nervous whenever Eddie smiled at him. He'd been so afraid of how to go about dealing with it, praying his feelings would vanish overnight. But after facing it, Richie's silly crush cemented itself in his heart as full blown never-letting-go-of-you love. Loving Eddie was apart of Richie now, arguably the best part of him. Most days Richie was happy having Eddie so close to him. They were best friends, they did everything together regardless of how much they fought. But of course, on those bad days, Richie felt guilty for wishing for more. Sometimes sitting next to him in the hammock wasn't enough. He wanted to hold his hand as they walked. He wanted to kiss Eddie's cheek after pinching it. He wanted to do more in that hammock than share comic books.

On those bad days, it hurt so immensely to know he could never have that. Because of course Eddie wasn't like him, didn't like boys that way. He probably thought it was disgusting. When he was honest, Richie thought that too, but he'd always been okay with being disgusting. But not Eddie. So Richie would sit there and nurse the heart he broke himself with his own blind stupidity, and will the monster from downstairs to rise out of its sleep and devour him so he didn't have to leave and face reality.

Reality would hit Richie hard two months after his first trip back to Neibolt. It was one of those days again, but Richie thought he was getting through it well. But Eddie had been acting strangely too, keeping a close watch on Richie and never straying too far away. As the day dragged on, Richie kept having to brush Eddie's hands off him, fighting the pang in his chest as he remembered everything

about Eddie he couldn't have. So he tried to keep his distance much to Eddie's dismay

By the time lunch rolled around, Richie was considering skipping the rest of the day and going home. But today had been okay so far, so he forced a wide smile and strode up to his usual table of losers.

"Top of the mornin' to ye losers!" He announced his arrival, donning the overzealous Irishman voice.

Stan just rolled his eyes and made room for Richie on the bench between himself and Eddie. "It's not morning anymore dumbass, it's twelve thirty." Stan corrected.

Richie grinned at him, praying it didn't look as fake as it felt. "It's morning somewhere, Mr. Manley." He said, carefully situating himself so he faced Stan more than Eddie.

Stan shook his head and returned to his conversation with Bill, going over some history assignment for a class they had together. Unable to ignore him for that long, Richie turned his attention to Eddie by trying to pick at bits of his food.

"Did Mrs. K pack anything special for her lover today?" He teased, trying to grab a slice of the apples Eddie's mother had packed. Eddie swatted at his hands.

"Bring your own goddamn food for a change, asshole!" Eddie said

Richie laughed. "But you know I love to eat whatever you mom can provide!" He said, smacking his lips. Eddie just groaned and after a moment Richie gave up and left Eddie to his lunch. Maybe he'd given up too early, because Eddie gave him a weird look when he'd dropped his hands.

Richie figured that was enough teasing for nobody to press him, so he let himself zone out and the world fall away to static around him. He picked at his school issued mac and cheese for a bit when Eddie nudged his shoulder.

"Ok, What is your deal?" Eddie hissed, bringing Richie back to the ground.

“My deal?” Richie asked, confused.

Eddie huffed. “You’ve been silent all lunch period which is just weird. You didn’t even make a joke when Bill complained about his mom being a hard ass, which was such a good setup *I* almost made a your mom joke. *Me*. But you didn’t say a thing.” Eddie frowned, and tilted his head. “You’re not acting like yourself.”

Richie managed a weak smile at the exchange he and Bill would have had on a good day. “*God, muh-my muh-mom is being such a hard ass lately.*” “*Oh, I know all about your moms hard ass, I was hittin it last night!*” But his smile faded as Eddie finished his statement.

Richie sighed, devoid of the energy to think up a good lie. “Maybe I don’t feel like acting like myself today, Eds.” He sighed.

Eddie looked so confused he didn’t even comment on the nickname. Instead he just stared at Richie as he pushed food around his plate.

“What the fuck does that even *mean* ?” Eddie demanded, loud enough to draw the attention of the other losers.

“Everything okay?” Ben asked, watching the two of them with concern.

Richie opened his mouth to answer but Eddie beat him to it. “No, something’s up with Richie and he wont tell me what.”

Richie glared daggers at Eddie, panic rising as all his friends turned on him expecting an answer. Richie was in no mood to perform his role as the resident joker, so he just shrugged.

“Rich, what’s going on?” Bev asked, worried for her friend.

“Nothing.” Richie snapped, harsher than he meant to. “I mean, c’mon guys, I’m allowed to be off my game for once.”

Stan wasn’t buying it. “Did something happen?” He pressed. “I know Belch cornered you yesterday but you said-”

“I’m fine, really!” He insisted, doing his best impression of a smile. It was very obvious nobody bought it.

“Would you just cut the shit and talk to us?” Eddie demanded, gaining Richie’s full attention. He was angry and confused, Richie could see that. Richie wasn’t usually one to hold back his thoughts and Eddie couldn’t figure out why he’d start now. But looking at Eddie, staring at him with confusion, frustration and just a bit of hurt, the pit in Richie’s gut got heavier by ten pounds.

He stood abruptly, jostling the whole table. He needed to be alone, *now*. He tried to think of something to say, some way to excuse himself, but he couldn’t.

Richie could feel tears pricking in his eyes, brought on by the overwhelming pressure of being watched.

“I just need to be alone for a bit.” He said, and before anyone could answer he just stalked off, leaving the others behind to wonder what had just happened.

When he was gone, all eyes fell on Eddie for an explanation. He didn’t have one.

“What was that?” Bev asked in a hushed tone, like she was afraid Richie would overhear them.

Eddie shook his head, jaw slack as he tried to comprehend what happened. He tried not to let his feelings get hurt when Richie snapped at them, but he’d been unresponsive all day, especially to Eddie. Eddie tried to think if he’d done something to upset Richie, but nothing came to mind. So what was wrong?

Unable to find an answer, he stood up. “I have no clue. He’s never been like that before.” He started packing his backpack with his lunch while the others watched. “Something’s up. I’m going to go find out what.”

“Is that a good idea?” Stan asked, looking worried. “He just said he wanted to be alone. Maybe we should trust him on that.”

Eddie shook his head, slinging his bag over his shoulder. “He’s upset, Stan. I can’t leave him alone right now.” The others nodded.

“You shuh-should go, then.” Bill said, “I think the whol-whole guh-

group might be too much right nuh-now, but he's always responsive to you, Ed-Eddie."

Eddie frowned, unsure how to respond to that. It had never been acknowledged aloud before, but everybody knew Richie and Eddie's friendship ran deeper than the rest. Eddie doubted the others knew exactly how deep those feelings went, at least for Eddie, but right now he was just grateful they understood how Eddie and Richie relied on one another.

Slowly, Eddie nodded and shouldered his bag. Before he could leave, Bev gently put her hand on his. "You tell him we're always here for him." She instructed. "All of us." Eddie nodded again, saddled with his mission. After giving the remaining losers a determined smile, he went to his get his bike.

Richie biked so fast his legs hurt. He'd really fucked up now, snapping at his friends like that. Snapping at Eddie. Wind pushed tears down his face as he rode towards Neibolt street. Derry passed him in a blur as panicked thoughts bounced around his head. Why couldn't he just be normal? Why couldn't he just smile and joke like he used to? Why did Eddie staring at him hurt and confused have to twist his heart the way it did?

In no time at all, Richie was screeching to a halt in front of the dilapidated house. He tossed his bike to the ground by the fence and marched up to the front door, flinging it open with none of the hesitation that accompanied the first time he'd been back. It was sickly ironic, he thought to himself, how after everything he'd been to, this was the closest thing Richie had to a safe space. But it made sense, in a weird way, he thought as he threw himself onto the love seat. Dust puffed up around him as he did.

This was a monster house, where a twisted freak hid away. Well, now Richie drew that tally up to two twisted freaks. Two godforsaken *things* that would be better forgotten and left alone. Sure, every once in a while it might crawl out and pester a few losers, but it would go away again to rest. He really was just like It, disgusting and better left alone.

As Richie sat there with his thoughts, shaking and crying clumsily into his hand, he was struck with a sudden *why the fuck not* thought. The sunlight streaming in through the fluttering curtains was too bright anyway. He felt too exposed in the sprawling sitting room, curled up on a filthy sofa. So why not.

Richie pulled himself up off the couch and made for the stairs to the basement, dropping his bag at the top of the stairs. He didn't think much as he was doing it, but the thoughts he did have were along the lines of *Why not? I'm a freak too*. He made his way down the stairs, kicking up dust as he went, until he laid eyes on the well. It looked plain, untouched by time, just like it had four years ago. One might think the doorway to the home of a murderous clown demon might be a little more grandiose, but to Richie it made perfect sense. That's what he thought as he slumped against the cold stone, back pressed uncomfortably to the bricks that made the well. Being so near the well now, Richie almost imagined that he could feel It just a few feet down. He thought maybe being here would draw It out of its slumber and It would run upstairs for a bite to eat.

Richie pulled a carton of cigarettes and a lighter out of his pocket and lit one, placing it between his lips as he cried. In some dark recess of his mind, Richie willed It to slither up from the well and let him rest.

Eddie was getting anxious. He'd checked every place Richie was known to enjoy: the clubhouse, the quarry, the barrens, and the arcade, though he rarely went there anymore. He'd even braved checking Richie's house. He didn't have the nerve to use the front door, that would let Richie's parents know they'd both skipped school. Instead he went around the back and climbed to Richie's bedroom window only to find it dark and empty.

Eddie was beginning to panic just a bit, trying to imagine where Richie could be hiding. *Either he really doesn't want to be found*, Eddie supposed, *or there's a reason I can't find him*. The second option shook Eddie so much he forced the thought aside. No, Richie was fine. The only thing that would be able to make Richie disappear like that was sleeping beneath Neibolt, and it was four years into a twenty seven year hibernation. It was not a player here.

Eddie wracked his brain for where Richie would have gone. He'd been gone from school for maybe an hour and a half now, he didn't have much time until school let out. Finally, Eddie settled on checking the train yard by the far side of town. It was a notorious spot for smoking and graffiti, and Richie had expressed interest in the place more than once before being vetoed by the other losers. As cool a spot it was, it was also popular with the Bowers gang and therefore too risky to visit. But they were all in school now, so Eddie may as well try.

The train yard was on the far side of town, in a corner nobody ever really had a reason to visit. Not only was it a long trek, but it would take Eddie right past the house on Neibolt Street. Eddie hadn't been back there since that day years ago, and as he rode past it he did his best to keep his eyes on the road ahead of him. Do NOT look at that house, he coached himself, don't think about what's in there. Even then, Eddie had to sneak a glance as he approached the old rusted fence. As he did, his eyes flicked over something that made him do a double take.

A bike, laying abandoned by iron fence around the house's yard. Eddie recognised the bike; it was Richie's. He braked so hard he almost went over the handlebars as he pulled over to where it lay. No mistaking it, that was Richie's bike. Eddie, very much winded from biking all over town had to brace a hands on his knees as his chest got tighter and tighter. He knew his asthma had been a lie but god what he wouldn't give for an inhaler right now. His head spun as he thought about the implications of Richie's bike being here. Richie was here. More accurately, Richie was in *there*.

Eddie finally looked up at the house itself. The door was ajar, swaying a bit when a breeze passed through. Eddie looked between the bike and the beckoning door, debating what to do. He should go get the others, they'd need to be together to face It again. But he couldn't pull himself away from the house. Eddie was filled with the need to be sure, absolutely positive Richie was here. He couldn't deny the way the open door called to him. No, Eddie had made up his mind. He approached the house.

As he crossed the threshold into the house, he tried to keep his fear at bay. It wouldn't kill him if he wasn't afraid, right? Think about

Richie, be brave for him.

As Eddie entered the house, he was struck the same way Richie had been by how mundane the whole house felt now. For a moment, it was hard to believe all the atrocities this decrepit little house held. He wandered the ground floor, first giving the sitting room a look around.

“Richie!” Eddie hissed at nothing, hoping his friend would call back in kind. Silence. Eddie cursed and moved towards the stairs where he found Richie’s backpack. He looked down on it, atop the stairs that lead downstairs and wondered if this was some kind of trick to lure him down to the well. As he went to grab Richie’s bag, a small noise emanated from the dark stairwell. It was quiet, but certainly something. Eddie froze, listening hard and debating whether or not to bolt. There it was again, louder this time. It was a thick, wet noise. A sniffle?

He stood completely still, straining to hear any sounds from down the stairs. For a tense moment, there was only silence. Then another sniffle, followed by a sob.

It was enough to send Eddie careening down the stairs in a panic.

“Richie!” He called as he ran, almost tumbling down the steps.

It’s got Richie its killing him oh god what if it’s too late I’m too late he’s-

Fine. Perfectly fine and alive, seated on the floor and facing Eddie as he hurtled down the stairs. Eddie came to a screeching halt at the foot of the stairs, staring wide eyed at Richie who stared back, equally confused. His eyes were bloodshot and his whole face was blotchy and wet with tears.

“Eds?” He asked, voice thick from crying. He sniffed again, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. Eddie couldn’t even bring himself to comment on the nastiness of it. “What the hell are you doing here?”

All Eddie could do was stare. Richie had a half smoked cigarette dangling from his fingers, and he continued to sniffle as he watched

Eddie with a dumbfounded expression. Richie's face was red and his chest was heaving, immediately cooling Eddie's fear that he might be dead. But as soon as that went away, something new and red hot flared within Eddie.

"What the hell am I doing here?!" He exploded. "What the hell are YOU doing here?!"

Richie just gasped at him from the ground, floundering like a fish. "I-I-"

"You're silent all day, you just up and walk out on us at lunch, and when I come looking for you where do I find your bike? Here!" Eddie paced back and forth, running on adrenaline and confusion. "I thought you got taken! I thought you were dead! But instead you're just sitting here for god knows why and I can't even BEGIN-" Eddie stopped himself when Richie flinched at Eddie raising his voice. Eddie felt all the fight leave him as Richie's shoulders shook when he dropped his head, his propped up knees hiding his face.

As fast as the anger had come it vanished, replaced instantly with guilt. Even if blowing up at him wasn't the best response, he had never expected Richie to react like this, to *cry*. It was a foreign experience, watching Richie Tozier cry. Eddie had never seen it happen before. It was one of those things Eddie had just assumed didn't happen because it wasn't supposed to. Richie was always so full of laughter and questionable jokes, and even when he was upset he was an unreconciled ball of energy. So seeing Richie, his Richie, reduced to tears because he'd raised his voice made Eddie's heart shatter into a million pieces.

"Hey, Rich, no, don't cry," Eddie rushed to kneel at Richie's side, fumbling to grab his shaking hands while inadvertently knocking the cigarette into the dirt "Please don't do that. C'mon, don't cry, I'm sorry I yelled I didn't know-" Eddie stopped himself, thinking of the multiple ways he could finish his sentence. Didn't know what? Didn't know Richie would cry, Didn't know Richie was upset, didn't know *why he was here*.

While he searched for words, Richie just cried harder. It had already been one hell of a day for him, so he'd dropped his little performance

a while ago. He hadn't anticipated on having to be alright for another few hours at least. But now Eddie of all people was here and he couldn't help himself from leaving into his touch.

Eddie understood what Richie was trying to do and opened his arms with no hesitation, letting Richie's head fall against his chest. Eddie cradled his head as he continued his attempts at comfort.

"I'm so sorry Richie, really. It's ok, please don't cry, you're okay. I'm right here. You're okay."

After a few moments, Richie's breath started to even out but it did nothing for the guilt rattling around Eddie. He'd lost his temper with Richie and as a result, he was crying. Eddie doubted he'd ever forgive himself.

He petted lightly at Richie's hair as sobs subsided to sniffles. "I'm sorry, Rich, I'm sorry," he repeated, if only to quell his own guilt.

"Why?" Richies voice was small, and he spoke so quietly Eddie barely heard him.

"Why what?"

Richie sniffed again. "Why are you sorry?" It wasn't an accusatory question, it sounded more like he genuinely didn't know why Eddie was apologizing.

"For yelling at you." Eddie answered. "I'm sorry that I made you cry."

Eddie was a little taken aback when Richie chuckled. He sat up, leaving Eddie's arms so he could wipe the tears and snot from his face. Eddie's stomach only flipped a little bit.

"Don't worry about it, I was crying long before you got here."

Here. Eddie had been so caught up in his emotions with Richie that he'd momentarily forgotten where they were. Remembering exactly where he was, Eddie put his hand on Richie's, halting him as he fiddled with his carton of cigarettes.

"Rich, why are you here?" He asked. Richie's face contorted into a

pained expression. "What's going on?"

Richie stared straight ahead, not willing to risk looking Eddie in the eye. He was positive Eddie was wearing his stupid puppy dog eyes, and Richie refused to fall victim to them right now. So he tried his hand at deflecting.

"I've got a hot date here with your mom tonight, Eds. There's nothing sexier than a life or death experience, really gets those hormones churning."

It was a pathetic attempt, they both knew it, but Eddie still had to push down a wave of frustration brought on by how distant Richie was being.

"Beep beep, Richie." He said flatly. Richie just swallowed and stared at the now cold cigarette butt on the ground. "Be honest with me, for once. Please? I- I'm really worried here, Rich. About why on earth you're here of all places." Eddie shot a glance at the well he was kneeling next to, almost expecting it to react.

"Just- talk to me. You've been off all day, you won't talk to us about what's going on and we can see that something's wrong. Something's been off for awhile now."

Richie took a deep, shaky breath as he pushed his glasses up his face so he could scrub at his eyes. Deflecting didn't work, and Richie was too drained to try again. Maybe if he gave Eddie what he wanted he'd go away and stop making Richie's heart ache.

He re-adjusted his glasses and let his hands fall to his lap, still not looking at Eddie. "I'm tired." He confessed, not sure where to go from there.

Eddie frowned. "You came back to the house we almost got murdered in, because you're tired." Eddie repeated, trying to grasp what Richie was saying.

Richie just shrugged. "I can be alone here, I guess."

Richie sounded so broken that Eddie had to resist the urge to pull him into a bone crushing hug. Instead he just took one of Richie's

hands in both of his, squeezing it in the most reassuring way possible.

"Why do you want to be alone?" He asked the question in a whisper, and Richie finally met his eyes. Richie's face, all red and wet, had new tears pouring down it from behind his glasses.

"It's better when I'm by myself." Richie said, letting all of it pour out. "You guys don't have to put up with me, I don't have to be funny so you'll keep me around, I don't have to deal with-" *my feelings*, Richie almost said before stopping himself, remembering his company.

"With- with- fucking shit. But it's whatever. It's usually fine, I just have days where I don't wanna, I don't know, do it I guess? Be me. I don't want to try to be somebody entertaining enough for you guys keep around because it's exhausting but what choice do I have, right? And it gets tiring, so yeah, sometimes I want to be alone. Sue me."

He sniffed again, wiping at his nose with the back of his hand. "But I can't go home because home sucks, and everywhere else is just... too much. So I started coming here because at least nobody expects shit from me here, you know? Maybe there is a killer clown downstairs. Hasn't bothered me yet. Just brings the total of unwanted freaks in this fucking house up to two."

Richie blinked the remnants of tears out of his eyes, going back to staring at his hands. Or, hand, as Eddie still had a tight drip on one of them which wasn't doing miracles for his blood pressure. Still, he sat and waited for Eddie to respond.

He didn't. Eddie had no idea what to say, completely blindsided by a part of Richie he didn't know existed. A part that could not only be deathly serious, but was hurting so deeply. He kept opening and closing his mouth trying to form words but didn't know where to start. In his head, he worked through the things Richie said. He thought they barely tolerated him, and it wore one him so much he ran to the one place he knew the losers would never look with a terrible thing he somehow thought he shared similarities with. Eddie ached with guilt, trying to find the words to tell Richie he wasn't like It and that they loved him no matter what, Eddie most of all.

Eddie must have been in his own head too long because Richie was

tugging his hand back out of Eddie's grip.

"Sorry to dump this on you, Eds." He mumbled, tucking his knees up to his chest. "I know you were just worried I'd up and died on you. Well I didn't, so you're good to go. I know being here is probably freaking you out anyways. I'll see you at school tomorrow, kay?"

Eddie blinked at Richie, dumbfounded. "Are you insane?" He asked, trying to keep from raising his voice again.

"Huh?"

Eddie scooted closer to Richie. His knees were getting achy and dirty but he couldn't bring himself to care. "I'm not going to leave you down here if this is the shit you've got in your head."

Richie blinked. "It'll pass, Eddie, just—"

"No way." Eddie pressed, putting a hand on Richie's knee. "Rich, fuck, I had no idea. About any of that. But you've gotta know that I—we don't keep you around for shits and giggles. We keep you around because we love you, jokes or no jokes. And that shit about—about unwanted freaks? We want you around so much. Every time you can't hang with us I feel like somethings missing. The losers aren't complete without you. You're no more a freak than the rest of us. You belong with *us*, Richie. Not here, not with it. You may a loser through and through, but never a freak."

Richie looked at him with a glimmer of something in his eyes, hope maybe, before he shook his head and looked down again. "You're just saying that so I'll stop bitching."

"Jesus christ Richie!" Eddie exclaimed, frustrated. "You're not bitching, you're upset and you're allowed to be upset once in awhile! I'm saying this because it's the goddamn truth. You don't annoy us, not really. You're, fuck, you're a part of us! You're a part of me."

Eddie takes a shaky breath before taking Richie's cheek in his palm so he had to look at him. "You get that? It's okay if you need space sometimes, its okay to get upset, but if you ever think you mean anything less than the world to me I'll- I'll—"

Richie just stared up at him, eyes wide and shiny and beautiful. "You'll what, Eds?"

Eddie couldn't help himself from closing the distance between their faces and pressing a crushing kiss to Richie's mouth. He felt Richie gasp against him as he squeezed his eyes shut. It was by no means an elegant kiss, probably by definition a bad one. It was a closed mouth kiss and Richie's face was damp with tears. With the speed at which Eddie had swooped in Richie's glasses were getting squished between their faces and it wasn't exactly a comfortable situation. That didn't keep warmth from blooming in both their chests as they kissed before vanishing as Eddie pulled away as fast as he'd leaned in.

Eddie started to panic, realizing what he'd done. This was definitely NOT the time or place for that, Richie definitely feels worse now, way to go Kaspbrak you've fucked it all now, you didn't even ask-

"Uh, sorry, what did I have to do for you to do that again?" Richie said dumbly

"What?"

"You said if I did something, you'd do that." Richie answered, looking a bit shaken.

Eddie realized he was still cupping Richie's face with his hand. Slowly, he moved his thumb over Richie's cheekbone, skating under the rim of his glasses. "If you ever think you mean anything less than the world to me."

"Well," Richie wore a small smile, and Eddie's stomach swooped seeing Richie's first genuine smile that day. "I really doubt I mean more to you than the whole wide world."

"Ugh, shut up." Richie was still smiling as Eddie tugged him into another kiss. This one was softer, and Eddie wound up putting his other hand on Richie's face too. Cradling Richie, their lips started to move against each other as they both relaxed into the kiss. Eddie felt giddy, realizing Richie was still smiling against his mouth. He'd never felt more whole than he did in that moment.

Eventually Richie was the one to pull away, examining Eddie. "This isn't pity, right?" He asked. "You're not just doing this because you feel sorry for me?"

"What? Rich, god no. I did it because I love you and I want you to know that. No more stupid questions."

That got a chuckle from Richie, which made Eddie soar. "Alright, alright, I love you too, Spaghetti."

Eddie frowned at the nickname but didn't correct it. "Maybe one more stupid question?" Richie pressed.

Eddie narrowed his eyes. "Sure?"

Richie swallowed, looking nervous. "Are you real?" The question was barely a whisper. "Are you really Eddie?"

Oh. He didn't have to explain what the alternative was, but that explained why Richie was staring at him like he might attack right now. Definitely explained why his hands were clenched firmly in his lap.

"I'm real." Eddie assured. "I'm real, I'm right here and I love you."

Richie nodded, looking relieved. Richie leaned in this time for a quick peck before Eddie clambered to his feet. After brushing himself off he helped Richie up, keeping a hold on his hand once he was upright.

"Let's get out of here." Eddie said as he lead Richie back up the stairs and into the sun, grabbing his things as he left.

He was still tired, sure, but this was better, Richie decided. Maybe he didn't have to pretend all the time. It wasn't a cure for the bad days, but maybe if Eddie was there, he wouldn't want to be alone so much.

Richie wouldn't return to the house on Neibolt street for twenty three years

Author's Note:

I hope you enjoyed this! It was entirely self indulgent and a bit OOC but i had a good time writing it. Please please please let me know what you thought in the comments, every single comment warms my heart. If you like my writing and want to see more, check out my other works or head to my writing blog @Topaztales on tumblr and leave a prompt! Thanks for reading, xoxo